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SUBJECT: NINEWA: SHABAK REJECT INCORPORATION INTO KRG

REF: A. (A) 06 BAGHDAD 04365

¶B. (B) 06 BAGHDAD 03283

Classified By: Ninewa PRT Team Leader James Knight: 1.4 (B) and (D)

This is a Ninewa Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) message.

SUMMARY

¶11. (C) Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) efforts to incorporate parts of Ninewa Province continue to fan tension in Ninewa. A number of Shabak leaders in Ninewa's al-Hamdaniya District insist that Shabak will not vote to join the KRG in a disputed territories referendum per Article 140 of Iraq's Constitution. More than 2000 Shabak families are now reportedly displaced, and few reconstruction projects are planned for Shabak areas. Intense negative responses from Kurds and Bartalah's Christian leaders followed PRT discussions with these Shabak.

END SUMMARY.

SHABAK REJECT INCORPORATION INTO THE KRG

¶12. (C) Ninewa PRT IPDAO Holtsnider arranged a meeting with a broad group of Shabak leaders on December 20 in Bartalah (Ninewa's al-Hamdaniya District). Ten Shabak representatives attended; all unanimously asserted that traditionally Shabak areas near Mosul are not "in dispute" regarding incorporation in the KRG.

¶13. (C) These leaders emphasized that the Kurdish Democratic Party (KDP) considers Shabak areas "disputed" so that they can be included in an upcoming Article 140 referendum. All said they prefer to remain in Ninewa Province rather than "join the KRG as a buffer zone." However, Qusay Abbas Muhammad, a member of al-Hamdaniya's District Council and Chair of the Democratic Shabak Assembly (DSA) party pointed out that Shabak would vote for an autonomous region of their own under the provisions of the Constitution's Article 118 if given the opportunity.

MUKHTARS UNDER KURD PRESSURE

¶14. (C) Ismail Ibrahim Salman, mukhtar (alderman) of Muafaqiyah village, reported he is under threat because he refuses to sign a KDP petition to support incorporation of Shabak areas into the KRG. Mahmood Muhammad Taqi, mukhtar of Mafniya village, and Sulaiman Abdullah Saadoon, mukhtar of Badna village, affirmed Salman's report and further noted that they had also

been pressured to sign this petition. Taqi further alleged that a deceptive petition form is used to trick mukhtars into signing; he noted he had in fact signed the petition because he had been deceived.

¶5. (C) IPAO Holtsnider was called later on 20 December by Council of Representatives member Dr. Hunain Qaddo (Shabak, Shia Coalition), after he had been informed of this meeting. Qaddo emphasized that Shabak reject incorporation into the KRG (reflets). He added that Shabak 'just want to be left alone'.

MORE SHABAK IDPS

¶6. (C) Hamdaniya District Council member Muhammad reported that Shabak areas have a total population of 400,000, including 200,000 on the east side of Mosul (right bank of the Tigris). He added that there are 73 Shabak villages northeast of Mosul. Muhammad indicated that Ninewa's Shabak are 25 percent Sunni and 75 percent Shi'a. He reported that more than 200 Shabak have been killed this year, to which he attributes the recent upsurge in Shabak IDPs. Muhammad observed that more than 2000 Shabak families (about 12,000 individuals) have registered as IDPs with the Ministry of Displacement and Migration as of 1 December.

RECONSTRUCTION FUNDS BLOCKED

¶7. (C) During the meeting, Muhammad also noted that

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provincial reconstruction projects are rarely planned for Shabak areas. Muhammad believes that projects for Shabaks submitted by his District are blocked at the Provincial Council since the Council is controlled by the KDP. (Note: 31 of the 41 members of Ninewa's Provincial Council ran on the Kurdish Alliance list, although only eight are professed KDP members. Ninewa's powerful Deputy Governor, Khasro Goran, is also KDP chief for Ninewa. 11 Provincial Council members are formally affiliated with the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan. End note.)

A STRONGLY NEGATIVE KURD REACTION . . .

¶8. (C) On 21 December IPAO Holtsnider was contacted by KDP Provincial Council member Mahdi Yousif al-Harki, who urgently insisted that all PRT questions about Shabak areas be directed to him. A number of additional calls and requests for meetings with KDP representatives were also received, all to 'clarify the situation in al-Hamdaniya'.

. . . AND A SIMILAR (SYRIAN) CHRISTIAN RESPONSE

¶9. (C) The Syrian Catholic priest of St. George's Church in Bartalah, Father Aimam P Danna; George Kako, a prominent al-Hamdaniya Christian businessman; and Bartalah's police chief, COL Rasheed Arif, met IPAO Holtsnider immediately after the Shabak meeting. Fr. Danna asserted that the Shabak are liars, and added that many Shabak are terrorists. Kako more temperately noted that relations between Shabak and Christians in al-Hamdaniya are strained. (Note: Christians in Ninewa include several denominations, which are in turn riven by factions -- Fr. Danna represents a very small Christian group. End note.)

¶10. (C) In a brief followup meeting with IPAO Holtsnider on 21 January, Fr. Danna unexpectedly insisted that Jaish al-Mahdi (JAM) members are now present in Bartalah. When asked what would have brought about the sudden appearance of JAM in a traditionally quiet area, Fr. Danna responded that Shabak Shi'a were responsible. When asked about JAM numbers in al-Hamdaniya, he said only that 'some members are deeply hidden in Bartalah'.

COMMENT

¶11. (C) The reaction of Kurd and Fr. Danna's group to our meeting with Shabak leaders opposed to the KRG expansion agenda underscores the volatility of this issue in eastern Nineva. Pro-KRG factions exist among all Nineva minorities, but most share the Sunni view that the KRG agenda is the most direct and immediate threat to their fair share of power and benefits. The current Kurdish Alliance control of Nineva's government and Provincial Council exacerbates these concerns, especially now since GOI Accelerated Reconstruction and Development (ARDF) funds are perceived to be allocated according to Districts' support for the Kurds and the KRG.

¶12. (C) COMMENT CONTINUED. The presence of JAM in Bartalah appears unlikely. Fr. Danna's assertions are more probably fearmongering in support of his side of longstanding contention between his Christians and Shabak Shi'a in Bartalah. END COMMENT.

KHALILZAD
SPECKHARD